

PROJECT BUREAU

Turning strategy into results.

GOVERNANCE DESK

Executive brief: the strategic governance layer that turns strategy into results

What problem does Governance Desk solve?

Most organisations don't struggle because people aren't working hard. They struggle because the portfolio is governed as separate projects, not as a system. The result is decision drag, benefit drift and late surprises.

- Executive and board forums become status-heavy, decision-light.
- Initiatives start without a clear trade-off against capacity.
- Dependencies surface late (usually when it is too expensive to change course).
- Benefits sit in business cases, but don't show up in operations.
- Risk and assurance activity creates paperwork - but not confidence.

Governance Desk is a strategic governance layer that integrates with your existing controls (Risk, Finance, Audit, Procurement and PMO) so strategy becomes decidable and deliverable - without creating a parallel bureaucracy.

Fewer late surprises	Faster decisions	Benefits that stick
Risks and dependencies surfaced early	Evidence-ready gates, less pack churn	Owned, tracked, reviewed before/during/after

Who it is for: COOs, CFOs, transformation leaders and executive sponsors who need to govern investments with confidence - and explain decisions clearly up to the board.

The executive questions you need answered (consistently)

Good governance is the ability to answer the right questions with the minimum evidence needed to decide. Governance Desk creates a simple rhythm so these questions are answerable every month, not just during an audit or a crisis.

Effectiveness

- 1 Are we doing the right initiatives - the ones that provide maximum value?
- 2 Are we realising the benefits from our projects and programmes?
- 3 Can we take advantage of new opportunities and re-balance the portfolio?
- 4 How can we accommodate a “must-do” initiative within the current portfolio?
- 5 Are we going to be able to deliver next year’s investment plan?

Efficiency

- 6 Are we doing these initiatives right - meeting the quality, time, and cost objectives?
- 7 Are we using our resources in the most cost-efficient manner?

Why “more PMO” doesn’t automatically fix it

Many organisations already have a PMO, yet governance still feels heavy and outcomes still drift. Research cited in our portfolio governance work highlights that top-performing PMOs operate at enterprise level and focus on strategy, but capability takes time to build and many PMOs don’t last long enough to mature.

Evidence at a glance (selected research):

- 85% of organisations already have a PMO; the difference is *how* it operates.
- The top-performing, strategy-focused PMOs are reported as 3x more effective in customer service and 2x more effective in increasing revenue.
- PMO capability can take up to 10 years to mature; a large proportion close within three years.

Sources referenced in Project Bureau whitepaper: PM Solutions (2016); PMI & PwC (2022); Bredillet et al. (2018).

A common pattern: value leakage across the portfolio

Benchmark patterns often show a minority of initiatives delivering all expected benefits, with a substantial portion delivering limited or no benefit (or being cancelled). Governance Desk is designed to reduce this leakage by governing decisions and benefits as a system.



Illustrative distribution: 15% all benefits, 35% some benefits, 35% no benefits, 15% cancelled (as discussed in Project Bureau research summary materials).

What Governance Desk does

Governance Desk is a lightweight, proportionate governance layer that improves decision clarity, benefits ownership and delivery confidence. It integrates with your existing controls rather than replacing them.

Assurance Spine (MAST)	Proportionate reviews at key moments - Concept, Pre-initiation, Delivery Pivot, and Pre-close/Benefits - focused on decision readiness, not templates.
Maturity Accelerator (P3M3)	Rapid baselines plus targeted sprints where they move the needle fastest: prioritisation, benefits ownership, dependency and risk clarity.
Benefits Heartbeat	A repeatable executive rhythm that connects investment to realised and forecast value with concise, trusted reporting.
Strategic Alignment	A transparent view of priorities, capacity and trade-offs to right-size demand and surface dependencies.

What changes in the first 12 weeks

Weeks 1-2	Clarify decision rights, current portfolio reality and immediate risks. Stand up the first version of a benefits and decision cadence.
Weeks 3-6	Pilot proportionate assurance on priority initiatives. Remove duplicated artefacts. Establish a concise executive view (decisions, risk, benefits, capacity).
Weeks 7-10	Expand across the top-value work. Embed the cadence and coach benefits owners. Make dependencies and trade-offs visible.
Weeks 11-12	Lock in the operating rhythm and forward plan. Confirm next-quarter priorities and the maturity uplift sprints.

Composite case studies

Examples below are composites based on common patterns we see across portfolios. They are intended to illustrate how Governance Desk is used in practice.

Overloaded portfolio (services organisation)

Challenge: 60+ initiatives, constant escalations, and executive forums dominated by reporting rather than decisions.

Approach: Introduced a decision cadence, simplified gates, and created a transparent priority/capacity view that forced trade-offs into the open.

Outcomes: Fewer late escalations, faster stop/start/slow decisions, and clearer ownership for value and risk.

Transformation drift (digital + operating model change)

Challenge: Projects were “green” individually, but benefits were not landing in operations and confidence was eroding.

Approach: Put benefits owners at the centre, installed a monthly benefits heartbeat tied to operational measures, and added pivot checkpoints for early correction.

Outcomes: Earlier detection of benefit leakage, improved forecast credibility, and better line-of-sight for executives and governance committees.

Defence manufacturer (manufacturing/operations disconnect)

Challenge: Manufacturing spend and overtime were accelerating without a matched sales pipeline. Budgeting was unreliable, margins were being eroded, and cash pressure was rising.

Approach: Established an integrated governance forum across Sales, Engineering, Manufacturing and Finance. Introduced spend-to-contract gates, scenario-based capacity planning and a concise financial/benefits view linking bids, contracts and production commitments.

Outcomes: Improved budget discipline, clearer “make-to-contract vs make-to-forecast” decisions, and a credible plan that aligned production commitments to pipeline reality.

What you get

Governance Desk is delivered as a practical operating rhythm and a set of decision-ready artefacts - not a pile of templates. Typical outputs include:

- A clear governance cadence: forums, gates, decision rights and escalation paths.
- A concise executive view: decisions required, top risks, benefits forecast vs realised, and capacity constraints.
- Proportionate assurance checkpoints (MAST) for priority initiatives - focused on decision readiness.
- A benefits ownership model and reporting rhythm that Finance and delivery teams can trust.
- A targeted maturity uplift plan (P3M3) with short sprints and measurable improvement.

Next step: Book a short conversation. We will outline where Governance Desk would sit in your governance ecosystem, the first assurance points that matter most, and a benefits cadence tailored to your portfolio.

Contact

Project Bureau

Phone: 02 6154 1061

Email: enquiries@projectbureau.com.au

Web: www.projectbureau.com.au

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/project-bureau/

Notes: Figures and performance statements in this brief are illustrative. Where research is referenced, it is drawn from Project Bureau's published summary materials and its cited sources (e.g., PM Solutions; PMI & PwC; Bredillet et al.). Results vary by context.